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NOFORN
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DEPARTMENT FOR AF/W (JHUNTER)

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [ASEC](#) [SL](#)
SUBJECT: MILITARY MANIPULATING KOROMA?

REF: A. FREETOWN 266
[1](#)B. FREETOWN 400

Classified By: Political/Economic Officer Amy LeMar for reasons 1.4 (b/d)

[1](#)1. (C/NF) Poloff was informed by a high-level security contact on October 15 that the civilian security sector blames the Minister of Defense and his inner-circle for influencing the President to call a premature Military Assistance to the Civil Power (MACP) in response to the recent spate of armed robberies (reftel B). According to source, the National Security Advisor stated in a National Security Council Coordinating Group meeting that he was aware that Defense Minister Conteh had ignored established guidelines by meeting with the President independently of the National Security Council (NSC), and pushed him to call a MACP without discussion with the Office of National Security (ONS) or the Sierra Leone Police (SLP).

[1](#)2. (C/NF) Source stated that the recent "hand-holding sessions" meant to foster unity between the military and police have had little impact, primarily because ONS and SLP believe that Conteh is deliberately using his warm relationship with Koroma to give himself and his military greater authority over civilian policing matters. The SLP had already undertaken a large-scale operation to address the armed robberies at the point that the MACP was called, and believe that military intervention is fueling greater hysteria than the situation warrants, and undermining public opinion in their abilities. SLP contacts fear that the downsizing military is trying to "create work for itself" in the hopes of getting increased resources and prestige.

[1](#)3. (C/NF) Conteh is known to have political aspirations, and could be angling to become indispensable to Koroma in an effort to win his support for 2017. Sources also suggest that he is being supported in his quest to augment his power by Chief of Defense Staff Clarence Nelson-Williams, and Brigadier Komba Mondeh. Both have been implicated in corruption schemes, and may have political aspirations of their own.

[1](#)4. (C/NF) Comment: Conteh is known to be Koroma's "blue-eyed boy," and has managed to keep his post despite damning evidence of corruption (reftel A). Civilian authorities had previously accepted that Conteh and his friends were lining their pockets, as long as the military made no attempts to interfere or encroach on their territory. If Conteh continues to use his direct-line to the President to circumvent the NSC structure, no amount of mediation will be able to stem the growing acrimony. UN contacts have expressed concern that this will be the basis for more unrest and violent incidents, which will distract and detract from the security sector's ability to address current threats, such as the situation in Guinea. Post suspects that the ONS will use its extensive dossier of Conteh's illegal doings, which has been kept under tight control until now, to force his cooperation. However,

the troubling question remains of why Koroma values the opinion of his Defense Minister, who was considered a fairly unremarkable soldier during his active-duty days, over his National Security Advisor and Council on civilian matters. Conteh's machinations are distracting the President, and risk diverting resources away from policing entities at a time when their civilian dominance is tenuous and needs to grow. If Koroma vests his confidence in Conteh, it could lead to the military being the sole guarantor of national security. An emboldened military that can defy civilian oversight is not in the best interest of Sierra Leone, nor the sub-region.

End Comment.

FEDZER